REFORMATION TODAY '75

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MR. GEOFFREY WILLIAMS SHOWN ABOVE WAS THE founder of the Evangelical Library, Chiltern Street, London. Mr. Williams unexpectedly passed away in hospital on April 16, 1975. Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones preached at the funeral service held in the parish church of Fishbourne, just outside Chichester in Sussex. The service was attended by about fifty people including Evangelical Library staff, old friends such as Mr. Sayer, Mr. Micklewright and Mrs. Irwin being present. Iain Murray came down from Scotland for the occasion to represent the Banner of Truth. Mr. S. M. Houghton and Pastor Norton of Oxford were also present. Mr. Williams was eighty-eight years of age and right up to the time of his being taken he devoted himself to the collection, preservation and the "making-useful" of valuable Christian books. The story of Mr. Williams' conversion and the establishment of the Library in London is described on page 27.
Mr. Williams is survived by his wife, Mrs. Joan Williams, to whom we extend sympathy in the gospel.

Editorial

Printing costs, inflation and the Common Market

THE TERRIFYING SPIRAL IN COSTS BROUGHT MANY PROBLEMS TO publishers and printing firms. There has been a delay in the publication of this issue due to the threatened closure of the printer responsible for producing *Reformation Today*. Also we have had to look very closely at production costs, the increased price of postage and the astronomical rise in the cost of paper and printing. However, we observe that we have been sustained in such a way as to have adequate provision for each issue of the magazine as it appears. We have been generously supported by our readers and without this support with which to subsidise the magazine we would not have been able to continue. A rise in the cost of subscriptions is indicated on the back of this issue and unless inflation is checked it is inevitable that future increases will have to be made. We are determined with the grace given to us to persevere. Also, should we continue in the Common Market (E.E.C.) after the referendum, our attitude will continue to be positive—that is to realize that the Gospel is a greater power than the forces of darkness, and that our responsibility is to attempt great things as did the sixteenth century Reformers. The Roman Church is weaker now than then and in several countries a pathetic shadow of her former self. Why not another great spreading of the truth to Europe and through Europe to the world? The story of Oncken in this issue is an example of a man receiving light in Britain and then spreading it throughout Europe. Let us think positively and exercise faith, resolution and positive action. Communism constitutes the greatest threat. A united Europe can stand in the way but there will be no such strength apart from a new divine impulse, a heaven-sent reformation and revival. Let us remember Psalm 110:1. Christ will reign until his enemies become his footstool!

The contents of this issue and the last issue

We welcome Ian Shaw as a contributor to the pages of *Reformation Today*. He is a member of the Caersalem Baptist Church where Russel Williams is the pastor and has attended Carey Conferences from their inception. Much interest was shown in Geoff Thomas' article on television in the last issue. Part two is even more vigorous! Letters have also been received expressing appreciation of the last issue particularly for the Survey of Evangelicalism and Patience in Tribulation.

Also welcome as a contributor is Pastor Bill Payne. If you want to know what he looks like you can refer to the inside cover of issue 23!

Cover picture: Mr. Gordon Sayer is pictured outside the Evangelical Library in Chiltern Street in the West End of London. The story is recounted of the establishment of the Library and a description given of the service it provides for Christians at home and abroad, on page 27 of this issue.

New Churches

The photographs opposite draw attention to three newly planted churches. Such are springing up in many places. For instance a small group are forging ahead with evangelistic endeavour at Dewsbury in Yorkshire. Richard Lee is due to speak at evangelistic meetings from May 13-15. The editor was preaching recently in Scotland and was encouraged to observe progress in several churches, particularly at the Bellevue Reformed Baptist Church in Edinburgh, although it is hardly fair to mention one at the expense of others.

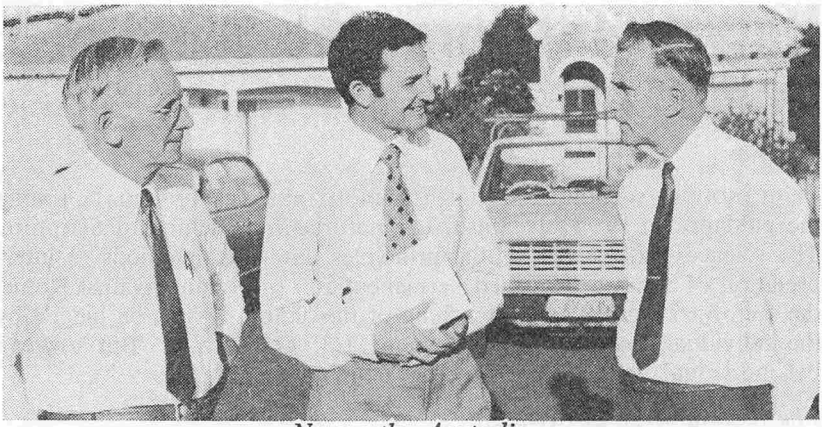
Several features characterize these churches. There is a strong emphasis on evangelism, particularly house-to-house visitation. There is a stress on eldership but in a flexible way. There can only be elders if such truly exist and actually possess and use the required gifts. A premium is placed on expository preaching and the aim is for teaching elders to devote themselves wholly to prayer and the ministry of the Word, being supported by the churches in a full-time capacity. There is adaptability with regard to buildings. The Reformed Baptist Church planted in Toronto last year have had to move with their full-time elder, Leigh Powell, no less than four times—yet the church continues to grow. When it came to a choice of paying for a full-time ministry or a building the former was rightly regarded as the priority.

The photos opposite

Newcastle, Australia. The three elders of the church from left to right, Jack Nattrass, Don McMurray and Clyde McIlwain. The church was formally constituted on March 15, Allan Rowe being the preacher.

Chelmsley Wood, Birmingham. This photo was taken on the church's recognition day (March 1), when Keith Mawdsley and the editor were the preachers and Ken Matrunola was the chairman. From left to right, David Guthrie, Keith Mawdsley, Alec Taylor, Ken Matrunola and Doug Boynton. Alec Taylor was recognized as the elder of the church. Doug Boynton and David Guthrie are two of the foundation members.

Crawley, Sussex. From left to right, Vivienne Parsons and her husband Malcolm, his twin brother Michael and his wife Ruth (son Matthew), with Mr. Bill Norton and his wife behind them, Mr. Austin Walker (daughter Rachel) and his wife Mai, Mrs. Don Evans, Mrs. and Mr. Frank Mugridge and Don Evans. Some members were absent due to illness. The editor preached on Revelation 21:2 at the service on March 8 when the church was constituted and Austin Walker set apart as an elder. Some of the congregation were liberally sprinkled because of downpours of rain which also made the photo barely possible. A new floor has been constructed —roof repairs to follow!



Newcastle, Australia.

Chelmsley Wood, Birmingham.

Crawley, Sussex.

How to Interpret the Word of God

Ian Shaw

EACH INDIVIDUAL CHRISTIAN HAS THE RIGHT AND RESPONSIBILITY UNDER the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret the teaching of Scripture. The science that teaches us the principles, laws and methods of interpretation of Scripture is called hermeneutics. In arguing against Rome, the Reformers said that the teaching of the church was to be judged by the individual, from Scripture (Deut. 13:1-3; Gal. 1:8-9). But how can the individual believer interpret the Word of God?

The natural sense of Scripture

Before a particular passage or verse is interpreted, three principles must be borne in mind. First, Scripture should be interpreted according to the natural sense of each passage. This involves asking what meaning the writer intended to convey. What was the meaning of the text, in its context, for the original readers? This is often called "literal" interpretation, but the term can be misleading. Each passage of Scripture has only one proper meaning. Medieval interpretation denigrated the natural sense of Scripture, by looking for various "deeper" levels of meaning. In this way the natural meaning could be contradicted by another meaning. The same mistake is still made. For example, unbelievers often say to Christians that a particular part of Scripture cannot be taken literally, but that the "spirit" of the passage should be followed. But there is no "spirit" of Scripture which contradicts its natural meaning. Again, liberal critics of Scripture make a false literal/spiritual distinction when talking about passages like the fall of man, the resurrection and the virgin birth. They want to retain a way of saying that the records are "literally" false, yet "spiritually" valuable. But "we may not turn narratives which clearly purport to record actual events into mere symbols of human experience at our will".[1]

This is not to say that a literal passage may not have a deeper meaning and this is recognised by the New Testament writers (1 Pet. 1:10-12). In dealing with the Pharisees, Christ does bring out a deeper meaning in the law, which had escaped them. But his argument is that this is the *real* meaning, and that the Pharisees had misunderstood Scripture. The law makes spiritual demands of inward righteousness, in contrast to the external righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:15-47). Paul was later to make precisely the same discovery, when he saw that the law makes the spiritual demand that "Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 7:7-9). Furthermore, Scripture may occasionally give a deeper meaning not intended by the original speaker as with the case of Caiaphas and the statement that one man should die for the people (John 11:47-53).

Whilst saying that Scripture only has one proper sense, we should note that there may be many different interpretations. Again, while a passage has only one meaning, it may have many applications. See, for example, our Lord's use of Hosea 6:6 (I will have mercy and not sacrifice) in Matthew 9:13 and in Matthew 12:7. In one case it is applied to Christ's dealings with publicans and sinners; in the other to the use of the sabbath.

The interpretation of Scripture

The second principle is that the scope and significance of one passage should be brought out by the relation of that passage to other passages. This principle was called by the Reformers "the analogy of faith" and is based on the assumption that the message of Scripture is a harmonious whole, having no contradictions within itself.

In practice, it means that we explain obscure parts of Scripture in the light of what is clear, what is secondary in the light of what is primary. We look for the inner links of Scripture. The epistle to the Hebrews helps us understand Leviticus, and the gospel records throw light on the Old Testament prophets. Finally, we are to act on the harmony of Scripture. Christ taught that Moses bore witness to himself and that those who believed Moses would believe him (John 5:37, 46). Paul devotes Romans chapter four to proving justification by faith from the Old Testament example of Abraham.

Interpretation before application

Our final principle is simple, yet of great importance. Scripture must not be applied in a way which does violence to the text. This is true, whether we are reading Scripture ourselves, teaching children, or preaching before the church. Having established the principles, how do we find out the meaning of particular verses or passages? The following rules are intended as an introduction. More detail is given in the books recommended at the end of the article. Examples are given to make the comments clearer.

Understanding the text

Familiarity with the original language is invaluable in discerning the meaning of particular words and phrases. However, this is beyond the reach of the majority of Christians, and is not as crucial as is sometimes suggested.

As a general rule, always study the passage before using the various helps such as concordance and commentary. Find out what the words *usually* mean, and consider how the original hearers would have understood them. We are familiar from our English Bible with the fact that words acquire a special meaning. "Prevent" means "anticipate", and "let" means "hinder" (1 Thess. 4:15; Isa. 43:13).

Whereas particular words in isolation may bear a number of meanings, they only bear one fixed meaning in the passage in which they occur. Furthermore, words repeated in a passage generally have the same meaning throughout. The exceptions to this are usually clear, for example, Matthew 8:22 (let the "dead" bury their "dead"), Romans 9:6 (they are not all "Israel" which are of "Israel"), 2 Corinthians 5:21 (he made him to be "sin" for us, who knew no "sin").

On other occasions the immediate context explains the meaning of the word. See, for example, "full age" as meaning mature (Heb. 5:14), "perfect" meaning equipped (2 Tim. 3:17), "creature" meaning creation (Rom. 8:19-23).

Finally, words may acquire a special meaning because of Scripture usage. An excellent example of this occurs in the conversation between Christ and Nathanael (John 1:47-51). This passage can only be understood in the light of God's dealings with Jacob. To understand the force of "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no *guile*" (*i.e.* "no *Jacob*") one must have read Genesis 32:28 where Jacob the deceiver, having met with God, is named Israel, a prince with God. Also, to understand verse 51 which promises to Nathanael that he will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on Christ one must be familiar, as Nathanael was, with the story of Genesis 28:10-19, where Jacob saw this, and it was a place of revelation and promise for him—Bethel, the house of God.

Understanding the context

First, we should seek to have a grasp of the true scale of Scripture. For example, the Old Testament prophets need to be fitted into the timescale of the historical books. Second, the purpose of the section or book needs to be clearly in the mind. This will illuminate, for example, the discussion of "faith" and "works" in Romans and James. In Romans, the means of justification—faith—is taught. James addresses those who claim wrongly to have this faith and urges the necessity of works. Third, we must get to grips with the course of thought and try to summarise what is being said in a passage. This is not always easy. In John 3 the connection between the questions of Nicodemus and the answers of Christ is not readily apparent. Christ, on the face of it, seems to avoid the questions and to change the subject. Careful reading is required to see the train of thought. Chapter divisions should be ignored. Ephesians 2:1 cannot be understood apart from a consideration of verse 17 onwards of the previous chapter where the power of Christ is taught. This is the power to raise the dead souls of chapter two. The use of the word "therefore" often suggests a link, as in the opening verses of Romans 5, Hebrews 4, 6 and 12. In some cases the connection of thought is less clear, as in Hebrews 5:11 onwards, where the link is based on association of ideas. The following examples illustrate how a study of the context resolves misunderstandings of particular verses.

(*a*) Joshua 24:15 "Choose you this day whom ye will serve". The invitation is not, as is commonly thought, to choose between the Lord and idolatry, but between two different sets of idols.

(*b*) James 5:14, 15 "The prayer of faith shall save the sick". The passage does not teach extreme unction, because the context shows that the writer is speaking of physical salvation.

(*c*) John 9:3 "Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents". Christ is not teaching sinless perfection, as the disciples' use of the word "sin" in verse 2 indicates. He means that no specific sin was the cause of the blindness.

(*d*) John 5:31 and 8:14. There is an apparent contradiction between these verses ("If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true"/ "Though I bear record of myself yet my record is true") which is resolved when we take into account the context. In chapter 8 it is a discussion of the law which requires two witnesses—Christ and the Father—and in the other it is Christ's person, to which he has the witness of his works.

Understanding the circumstances

Knowing what kind of people Moses, Paul, Amos, Ezekiel and Jeremiah were, will help us understand their writing. More particularly, a knowledge of the social customs of the times can greatly enrich our reading of God's word.

Examples:

(*a*) Matthew 5:40, where the man who takes your coat is to have your cloak as a gift. The cloak was so important that, if borrowed, it had to be returned to its owner by nightfall.

(*b*) Matthew 3:12, where Christ is promised as coming to purge with a fan. In the evening breeze, the farmer winnowed his crop with a five-pronged rake ("fan"). The corn was tossed in the air and the breeze took away the straw and chaff.

(*c*) John 10:7, where Christ speaks of himself as the door of the sheep. After counting the sheep into the fold, the shepherd lay across the door to sleep.

(*d*) Psalm 19:9-10, which describes the Word as sweeter than honey. On their first day at school, Hebrew children were given slates smeared with honey, which they had to lick off, and cakes on which texts were written.[2]

Figurative language

A number of special problems arise in the interpretation of Scripture. For example, figurative language frequently occurs, where the new and unfamiliar are described in terms of the familiar. In the Old Testament God used "figures of the true" which were "shadows of good things to come". There were similes (Psa. 103:3—forgiveness like healing) and metaphors (Eph. 2:19-22—the people of God as a building), or pictures existing only in the imagination (Dan. 2:31-35—the great image).

The first point in interpreting figurative language is to recognise it as such. The devil is not literally a "roaring lion" (1 Pet. 5:8); the bread of communion is not literally Christ's body (cf. "All flesh is grass" Isa. 40:6). Thus it is possible to accept as true two statements which, as literal facts, would be mutually exclusive. For example, in Psalm 18:11 God is said to make "darkness his secret place", and in 1 Timothy 6:16 he is said to "dwell in light". In the first case, darkness means inscrutability, and in the second, light means purity. In Exodus 33:11, 20, the phrase "face to face" means first, without the intervention of another, so that Moses could speak to God "face to face", and second, having a full and familiar sight of divine glory so that Moses could not in that sense see God's face.

When interpreting parables, it must be remembered that Christ had two purposes in speaking in parables: to reveal spiritual truth to the disciples, and to conceal it from those who are insincere and at enmity to the truth (Matt. 13:10-17).[3]

The Holy Spirit our interpreter

Having said all this, it remains true that understanding of Scripture comes only from the Holy Spirit. The Bible is *not* to be read like any other book. The same doctrine of redemption is taught in both testaments—the New Testament is implicit in the Old Testament, the Old is explicit in the New. We need to avoid the twin dangers of minimising the Old Testament as does Schofield's dispensationalism, and reading too much into the Old Testament. A particular passage or book should be approached by asking how much it contributes to the progressive unfolding of God's mind.

While the Holy Spirit is our interpreter (1 Cor. 2:10-16), "the Spirit is not given to make Bible study needless, but to make it effective".[4]

Pastors have a responsibility to see that Christians grow in their grasp and understanding of Scripture being exercised in their ability to interpret its meaning rather than inculcating the notion that this must always be done for them.

REFERENCES

1 J. I. Packer. *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, I.V.P., p. 105.
2 *Life in New Testament Times*, Ladybird Books. This has numerous examples of customs referred to in Scripture.
3 L. Berkhof. *Principles of Biblical Interpretation.* Baker, pp. 82-91, 100-102; A. Stibbs. *Understanding God's Word*, I.V.P., pp. 40-51.
4 *Op. cit.*, p. 112.

READING

In addition to the four books referred to above, the following are of help:
The Saviour and the Scriptures, R. P. Lightner. Presbyterian and Reformed.
Expounding God's Word, A. Stibbs. I.V.P.
Biblical Theology, G. Vos. Eerdmans.
The Right of Private Judgment, P. Helm. Banner of Truth, December, 1972.
History and Biblical Interpretation, P. Helm. Banner of Truth, March, 1973.

Gratitude is expressed to Edgar Johnston, of the Bellaire Baptist Church, Houston, Texas, for the help and inspiration given to make the following biographical study possible. Proficiency in the German language and zeal for the truth has enabled Mr. Johnstone to accrue valuable information on the life of Oncken such as his friendship and co-operation with Spurgeon, the influence of the doctrines of grace upon his life, his motivation in planting churches and his views on church government. This material has not been incorporated here but we hope to print more about this German pioneer in future issues.

ONCKEN

Pioneer Baptist of Europe

GERMANY. INDUSTRIALISTS HAVE LONGED TO EMULATE ITS ECONOMIC growth rate. Politicians have found it to be the enigma of this century.

Its modern theology has spawned a liberalism which still grips the churches. Yet its greatest son was the father of the Reformation. Or was Luther really its greatest son? Very high in Germany's gospel ranks must come Johann Gerhard Oncken. Prior to 1834, Baptists as we know them were virtually non-existent on the continent of Europe (the Mennonites excepted). In that year Oncken was baptised. He became the pastor of the first Baptist church, in Hamburg. Writing in 1866, members of that church in Hamburg could say:

> Through the wonderful work of God from this local church, the evangel of Christ and the truth, as we know it from the Holy Scriptures, has sounded forth not only in the whole of the German fatherland, but also beyond its borders, and there are presently churches and preaching stations in Denmark, Sweden, Poland, Russia, Austria, Hungary, Wallachia, Turkey, Switzerland, France and Holland.

The history of this work of God is—and how important this is for us today—not so much the history of one individual, gifted though he was. It is more the history of a local church of outstanding vision and power.

The German background

Thanks largely to Martin Luther, the state-upheld Lutheran church held complete religious sway in Germany in the 17th and early 18th centuries. But Luther would certainly not have countenanced the preachers who filled the pulpits. Most were rationalistic. Dissent from rationalistic state religion, in Hamburg at least, was unknown. There was therefore a terrific rumpus when Johann Oncken first began to hold meetings in private houses in the city. He had himself been brought up in the Lutheran church in his native town of Varel, in Oldenburg. But it was not until he left home in 1813, in his fourteenth year, that he first came under a godly influence. A Scottish merchant whom his father knew, took the boy with him to Scotland to "make a man of him".[1] Perhaps he thought Scotland would do this better than Germany!

Anyway, the merchant may have made a man of Johann; he undoubtedly contributed to making a Christian of him. Johann Oncken was greatly affected by the Presbyterian atmosphere in which he found himself. A Bible was given to him which he began to read. Later he moved to London and lodged with a family from a local Independent chapel. Both the public worship and family worship convicted him during his stay in London, and ". . . it pleased God to bring the young Oncken into the life which is from God. And as soon as he was assured of the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ, and the blessedness of adoption filled his heart, an irresistible urge stirred within him to commend salvation in Christ to others also". (Hamburg Church Record.)

For nine years Oncken carried on in the merchant business. All this time his fervent desire to spread the gospel was to be seen. He would go without meals and use the money he saved to buy evangelistic tracts which he gave out in large quantities. His spirit of zeal and sacrifice is

a rebuke to us all. Two ministers who discerned that here was a man whose gifts should be developed, arranged a contact with the "Continental Society". As a result he was appointed, by them, as a missionary in his native country. In the same year he married Sarah Man and together they settled in Hamburg.

There was an English Independent assembly in the city, which they joined, and the pastor, Thomas Matthews, encouraged Oncken to expound informally to some German folk in a private home.

Oncken is opposed

The first exposition took place on January 4, 1824, and was the means of the conversion of C. F. Lange, who later became a valuable supporter. The later records describe this meeting and the subsequent events:

> The first assembly, in the home of Pastor Matthews, consisted of ten persons. The preaching of the "new English religion", as it was labelled by the people, spread like wildfire through the city and in less than six weeks not only the assembly hall, where the lectures were held, but also the whole house, was packed full. The rush to get tracts was so great that on the appointed afternoon five hundred people would come to get tracts.

This was too much for the local clergy who persuaded the police to suspend the meetings. Nothing daunted, Oncken began to preach in the streets, in cafes, and wherever else he could find hearers. Because of the threat of expulsion from the city, he set up a book-selling business and was registered as a citizen of Hamburg.

Various other venues were found for the meetings, but right up to 1842 every attempt was made by "threatenings, prohibitions, citations, infringements and incarceration" to intimidate the intrepid preacher. There were periods of relief when a Senator Hudtwacker, who was a God-fearing man, was head of the city police. After this man's death, the new chief of police, Senator Binder, made it his declared aim to stamp out the work which flourished so much under Oncken's preaching.[2] Those attending the meetings were noted and on May 13, 1840, police broke up a service and arrests were made. Oncken was sentenced to four weeks in prison. He made the most of his time there and a record remains of his witness to the jailor. On being released he was told, "Mr. Oncken, you are free, but you know how to conduct yourself". In apostolic fashion he replied: "Senator, I must take up again where I left off". He was let go, but with the warning, "Then you know the consequences".

Heavy costs were demanded by the government to pay for the trial. These Oncken refused to pay, since he did not admit to the legality of the proceedings. As a result, his belongings were seized and sold by auction. Sarah and the children (there were five, two had died in infancy) were severely hit by this, though the church was able to raise funds to compensate them, at least partially. It is very interesting to note that the Hamburg Senate was presented with a petition drawn up by Baptists in

England and the U.S.A., presenting the case for the Hamburg church to be allowed to worship freely and unmolested. There were no less than 6,000 signatures, with addresses. This had its effect, largely perhaps because Germany was anxious to preserve good trading relations. It may be a lesson to us to be more vociferous in pleading the cause of our Baptist brothers today who are being persecuted often in a far more severe way than was Oncken. Are we not being too apathetic about this?

Formation of a church

From 1824 onwards, numerous people were converted in the city of Hamburg. Meetings were being held in various homes in all parts of the city and suburbs, but no formal church organisation existed. The need for this became pressing. The church narrative relates the story well:

> The newly converted, persecuted by the church and the authorities, were completely without church association and the disadvantageous consequences of the lack of an ordered fellowship made itself felt more and more. In addition, brother Oncken had for a long time already had doubts about the scripturalness of the baptism of children. For these reasons he made the suggestion to some brethren to meet once a week to clear up these questions by a study of scripture . . .

As far as we can judge, 1826 appears to be the first time Oncken made any definite reference to Baptist leanings. An offer was made to him to pay for theological training so that he could become an official clergyman. One remark he later made about his refusal of this offer was: "I already had doubts about infant baptism".[3] No strong link with Baptists of his time can be established at this point.[4] We take up again the record of the "study group":

"These meetings occurred during two winters and were held in the shoemaker's shop of dear brother Diedrich Lange. The result was that brother Oncken, along with five other brothers and two sisters, were convinced that only believers were to be baptised by immersion into Christ and thereupon be united to the church. Following this knowledge was the wish to comply with the command of the Lord. But now a grave problem arose since there was no one in Hamburg who could rightfully baptise."

Thereupon in 1829, Oncken corresponded on the subject of how to proceed with baptism with Robert Haldane in Edinburgh. Haldane had himself an intimate knowledge of the European scene. In 1816 he had expounded the epistle to the Romans at Geneva. These lectures later formed the basis for Haldane's magnificent commentary on Romans. There was a spiritual awakening under Haldane's preaching at Geneva and some of the students converted at that time later became the evangelical and Reformed leaders of the French speaking world, men such as Merle d'Aubigne, Felix Neff, Caesar Malan, Gaussen and Adolphe Monod. Haldane, with his brother, had become a Baptist. The two

brothers, James and Robert, were responsible for founding many Particular Baptist churches in Scotland.

In this case, however, no reliable advice came from Haldane. Meanwhile Oncken got to know a sea-captain who rejoiced in the name of Calvin Tubbs. Tubbs was an American whose ship was docked in Hamburg. Oncken, concerned for evangelism among seamen, had in fact preached on board some of the ships which came into Hamburg. Tubbs, on returning to the U.S.A., reported to the Baptist Association on the position Johann Oncken found himself in. This was in 1829, but it was not until four years later that Oncken and his friends finally received a visitor from America who could baptise them. When we compare this long wait and trial[5] with the ease with which modern converts can in some areas nip round to the nearest Baptist church and be baptised almost at the drop of a hat, we might ask the question: would it not be better to have some delay to test whether real perseverance exists?

The visitor who finally arrived in 1834 was Dr. Barnas Sears, President of a Baptist college in Rhode Island. He was touring German universities and took his time to get to know Oncken well and investigate over several months the instruction given to the church. Here is a description of these first baptisms and the constitution of the church.

On the evening of April 21 (1834), in brother Oncken's home, each candidate made a profession of faith in the presence of all. On the following evening, on April 22, holy baptism was conducted (on Steinwerder Island, where the Reihersteig flows into the Elbe, across from the harbour) by Dr. Sears. Those baptised were J. G. Oncken, his wife Sarah, Diedrich Lange and his wife Henrietta, Heinrich Kruger, Ernst Buckendahl and Johannes Gutstorff.

On the morning of April 23, in brother Oncken's home, each of these gathered with brother Sears for the instruction of the church. Brother Oncken was chosen as elder and preacher and was ordained by brother Sears. Two years later brother C. F. Lange and Heinrich Kruger were chosen as deacons.

Confession of faith

In 1837 a Confession of faith for the young Hamburg church was drawn up by Johann Oncken and Julius Köbner. Köbner, the son of a Jewish rabbi, had gone to hear Oncken when he was living in the area of the Baptist meeting house in Hamburg. Awakened through Oncken's preaching he was baptised by him in 1836. His Hebrew training was invaluable and in combination with his insight and imagination contributed to his becoming outstanding in theology, history and literature. The Confession which was drawn up by these two was rejected by some of the members of the church (there were by this time over 60 members) because of its "outspoken doctrine of the election of grace".[6] Compromise being impossible, the dissidents were actually excluded from membership!

After its adoption by the Hamburg church, the confession was debated at length and was somewhat modified to make it suitable for wider use.

The form in which it appeared in 1848 was the form which was accepted by almost all the churches planted through enterprise and encouragement from the church at Hamburg led by Oncken. The following is the complete Article 5, on Election to Salvation, which caused initial controversy.

We believe that it has been from eternity the free and independent good pleasure, the definite purpose of God to redeem sinners. Therefore as before the foundation of the world it was out of unfathomable, compassionate love, determined in the Godhead that Jehovah the Anointed should through his incarnation and his death be the Redeemer, so were the persons of the lost human race to whom redemption should in the course of time be really communicated also chosen by the Father, their names written in heaven, they themselves given over into the hands of the Redeemer, as his people, as the sheep of his pasture, for whom he would lay down his life as his inheritance, as the booty of his death struggle and as his bride. To these persons was the eternal life in Christ apportioned and likewise were all the means decreed which should bring them to faith in Christ, to holiness and finally to eternal salvation. Such decree of God is unchangeable and eternally fixed so that those to whom it refers, the elect, cannot be torn out of the hands of Christ, rather through the power of God in faith and in love to Christ they remain guarded until they become fellow-heirs of his glory.

The other articles are, in similar fashion, thoroughly Calvinistic in content and presentation, but with their own individual character, distinguishing the Confession from existing statements such as the 1689 London Baptist Confession. The 15 articles are: Of the Word of God, which clearly states the infallibility of Scripture; Of God; Of Sin; Of Redemption; Of Election to Salvation; Of the Means of Grace and their Order; Of the Conversion of the Sinner through the Word of God; Of Holy Baptism; Of the Holy Supper; Of the Church of the Lord; Sanctification; the Divine Law (with a special section upholding the perpetuity of the Sabbath); Civil Order, and the Last Things.

The article on the church sets out apparently separate offices of elders and preacher, though it states that these are "frequently united in one person". Preachers can follow a temporal calling. Learning, for them, is "desirable, but not absolutely necessary". Strict Communion is taught in the section on the Supper: "The Holy Supper is exclusively and only for such as through God's converting grace have become his possession and have received holy baptism". Oncken came under fire from some English Baptists for this belief, but many European Baptists followed his example.[7] He held that his practice was Scriptural, indeed it was a fixed principle with him not to accept anything unless it could be proved clearly and distinctly from the Word. This does not mean he disregarded other writings. Dr. H. Luckey in his scholarly work *J. G. Oncken und die Anfange des deutschen Baptismus*,[8] shows that Oncken had studied Calvin, particularly in relation to baptism and the covenant, but rejected Calvin's argument for infant baptism.

Persecution abates

In 1842, the Hamburg assembly, which had been meeting in the Oncken's house again, due to the police guard on the former premises, was forced

to procure a bigger place to accommodate the increasing numbers. It was expected that this return to public gatherings would provoke renewed persecution. Oncken exhorted everyone to pray for peace and this prayer was answered in remarkable way. In the same week as the move to the new building (a huge granary!) was made, says the church record, the Great Fire broke out.

"The fire left a great part of the city in ashes and thousands of families homeless. The misery of so many unfortunate people caused brother Oncken to offer the new meeting place to the authorities for accommodating the homeless. This offer was received with thanks, and 80 people found food and shelter here for eight months. Through this severe visitation of God to our city and the opportunity which the church was offered to give a palpable proof of their love and sympathy, the authorities were disposed to treat the church less severely and the persecutions were all but ended. When a mob attacked the church shortly after this the authorities and especially the police chief confirmed their friendly attitude toward us."

Oncken believed that this terrible destruction was a judgment of God upon the godless city of Hamburg—out of a population of 200,000 only two per cent. attended any kind of church. He rejoiced that the sufferers whom he took in began to attend the services and he was able to report the "ingathering of God's elect". Perhaps there is a lesson for us in his ready concern for the needy and willingness to use church property in this way.

It would be wrong to imagine that Baptists in Germany had complete religious freedom from this time on. They were still suppressed in the interests of the Lutheran church. Mobs could break up meetings without the police bothering too much. Publications were censored. Baptist children were sometimes forcibly "christened", and all had to be entered in the State church book. Only State church pastors could conduct marriages. With the passing of laws in 1848 and 1850 proclaiming religious liberty, it seemed that all this repression would be over. There was certainly an immediate increase in outward activity. In 1848 the first Baptist journal, *Das Missionsblatt*, was published. The first Associational gathering of churches was held in the same year. There was great rejoicing and singing of "Now thank we all our God" (*Nun danket alle Gott*). It was left to Oncken to sound a warning: "If hitherto we have needed grace to suffer and to endure, we need it doubly now for joyous and full self-dedication to the work of spreading the Gospel". Opposition, not lack of resistance, is the inspirer of courage and tenacity.

But in fact the opposition soon mounted again. This was not so much from the authorities as from the mobs, who were able to get away with so much violence because the police were inactive. Large numbers of Baptists, often deprived of ordinary civil rights, decided to emigrate.

Others stayed and bore patiently the insults they received. Lehmann, who had become the pastor of a daughter church in Berlin, wrote a letter to the officials and church authorities in Berlin, entitled: "Open letter to the German *Kirchentag*, 1854", in which he protested against the treatment of Baptists. This, together with a visit to the same official bodies by members of the Evangelical Alliance (including Merle d'Aubigne) on behalf of the Baptists, produced an improvement. In January, 1855, Oncken, Lehmann and Carl Schauffler—a member of the Hamburg church—received audience with Frederick William IV and presented a petition. The King promised favourable attention. Freedom was procured in Hamburg in 1858, but in other parts of Germany Baptists suffered for several years after this. The State church relationship which the Lutheran church enjoyed was dissolved in 1866.

Growth in Hamburg

The church record of 1866 gives a vivid idea of how the Hamburg church had progressed up to that time.

The total number of members at the end of 1865 came to 719 persons. Besides brother Oncken in the course of time Julius Köbner and Carl Schauffler were chosen as preachers by the church; these brothers served the assembly with diligence, brother Köbner from 1844 to 1852 when he went to Barmen to pastor a church there and brother Schauffler from 1846 to 1855 when he was called to South America on business.

In the proclamation of the Word, not only in the city, but also in surrounding areas, both far and near, other brothers helped. At the end of 1865 the church had 64 preaching centres . . . mostly in places where members of the church lived. Besides this, the mission activity of the church included regular Sunday School, a day school, and a widespread tract ministry under the special leadership of brother J. Braun, distribution of Holy Scripture . . . then also youth groups, unmarried women's societies, women's missionary societies, a mission-work society, and instruction of missionaries, of which, from 1849 to September 1865, 81 brothers prepared themselves for their ministries.

To sum up, the spread of the word was through preaching, literature, hymns and Sunday Schools. Oncken had from the beginning believed in reaching all types of people and could detail many cases of new birth among children through the Sunday School as well as adults through other means.

The expansion which had taken place necessitated a new building and a chapel was opened in 1867 in Hamburg. C. H. Spurgeon was one of many who came to preach at the opening services. He and Oncken had met first in London. Oncken requested the interview. Spurgeon at first sent a terse message in reply: "Tell Mr. Oncken, I have no time for chats. If the angel Gabriel should call and wanted a chat, I should say to him, 'Most willingly, dear Gabriel, but it must be on the other side of Jordan' ".[9] It took more than this rebuff to put off a man like J. G. Oncken! He replied that he had no time for chats either, but had come to present Spurgeon the cause of his 80 fellow labourers (mentioned

above). Mr. Spurgeon relented and the two shared the New Park Street Pulpit.

When Spurgeon visited Hamburg at a later date accompanied by his wife, it was to a great reception. For instance, the whole of the Episcopal congregation in the city, with their minister, came to the Baptist chapel to hear him. Spurgeon had feared that the high vaulted roof of the chapel building might not suit his voice. After inspecting it the night before preaching he said, "I had rather take twenty stripes on my back at the bottom of that garden than have to preach in that chapel tomorrow". Needless to say, his fears were groundless.

Right up until Oncken's death, in Zurich in 1884 (fifty years after the Baptist church was first constituted) the Hamburg church continued to form a spearhead for action. Men went out from it to all parts of Europe. Courses were held for theological students from 1850 onwards, and in 1880 a permanent seminary with a four year course of study, was opened.

The wider scene

From the beginning the theme of Johann Oncken's evangelism was church-planting. The number of countries in which he was instrumental in planting the first Baptist church speaks for itself.

Denmark—Oncken and Köbner travelled to Copenhagen in 1839 to baptise 11 persons whom Köbner had been corresponding with about baptism. They formed the first Danish Baptist Church. Köbner later was sent as pastor to Copenhagen in 1865.

Switzerland—Oncken visited Switzerland in 1847 and as a result of his influence the first Baptist church was formed in Zurich two years later.

Holland—Dr. Feisser, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church, but unconverted, was awakened by the grace of God, began to preach the Gospel of grace and to question the mixed nature of the Reformed church, and finally came to the point where he refused to administer infant baptism. For this offence he was suspended in 1843. Oncken, hearing about it, sent Köbner to investigate. The result was that Feisser and six others were baptised by Köbner in 1845 and a church was formed.

Sweden—F. O. Nilson, who was baptised by Oncken in Hamburg in 1847, with five others formed the first Swedish Baptist Church, in Gothenburg, in 1848. Later he was sentenced for his preaching, and banished. One of the lawyers at his trial was converted through his testimony. Despite the set-back, Baptists increased.

Russia—In Lithuania Oncken founded the first Baptist church, German speaking. He travelled in Russia as late as his 70th year.

Influence was also felt outside Europe, for instance in South Africa, where Gutsche, who had been taught by Oncken, was responsible for

gathering together German-speaking Baptist churches. Once when Oncken was asked how many missionaries he had, he gave the number of church members. Each was a missionary.

It is significant that almost all these churches began in a small way, but soon began to grow and to be the means of planting other churches. Most were united in the Calvinistic Confession of faith already quoted.

In conclusion let us note that this wider work could never have been carried out by one man. That one man did have a consuming passion for the glory of God, the salvation of sinners and the building of churches. He did have almost inexhaustible energy, great powers of organisation and persuasive preaching gifts. But in the providence of God others were raised up with him to supplement his lacks. We have referred to two who with Oncken formed the *Kleeblatt* (clover-leaf)—Köbner and Lehmann. Each of these had long and active lives. Köbner (1806-84), in earlier life an unconverted playwright, then becoming a right-hand man in Hamburg and later building up churches in the industrial Barmen area and in his native Denmark, was a tower of strength. Lehmann (1799-1882) was studying literature, languages and music in Berlin and through correspondence with Oncken the latter eventually came to baptise Lehmann and five others and to form a church in Berlin in 1837. Lehmann became a far-seeing diplomatist, an enthusiastic leader and a faithful pastor with a massive appetite for work.

REFERENCES

1 Quoted in *The Baptist Movement in the Continent of Europe*, by J. H. Rushbrooke, page 19. This book is useful for general information. It fails to deal with Oncken's Calvinism.

2 It was Binder who said, "So long as I can move my little finger it shall be raised against you". Oncken replied, "I think, sir, that you do not see what I see, which is, not a little finger but the mighty arm of God". When Spurgeon later preached for Oncken, Binder was in the congregation in Hamburg. Spurgeon commented that the finger had willingly bent before the mighty arm! J. H. Cooke, who quoted the words of Binder in *John Gerhard Oncken* (published by Partridge & Co., 1908), knew Oncken personally, and therefore his book is more valuable.

3 Rushbrooke, p. 21.

4 Preaching at the 25th anniversary of the Hamburg Baptist Church, Oncken said he was convinced by Scripture about believer's baptism before he knew or heard of Baptists.

5 This trial included opposition from his pastor, Mr. Matthews, in the Hamburg English Church. Matthews said: "Under no consideration whatever must you be baptised, Oncken". (Quoted by Cooke.)

6 Quoted by McGlothlin in *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, p. 331 (pub. Baptist Historical Society, 1911). The full Confession of 1848 is in this fascinating compendium of confessions.

7 For instance, the Swedish churches, see the article by Nils Sundholm in *The Baptist Quarterly*, Vol. XV, p. 183.

8 I consulted the copy (with the help of my wife who reads German) in the library at Baptist Church House, 4 Southampton Row, London. This is a reference library only and it is wise to make an appointment to consult any of the magnificent selection of books on Baptist history which are there.

9 J. H. Cooke, p. 159.

In part one which appeared in the last issue Geoffrey Thomas quoted Eliot Daley's belief that, T.V. has robbed many children of their childhood, "adult banality, precocious commercialism, visions of evil, all flooded their waking hours". Also quoted was a book called The Ravenous Eye *in which the author maintains that T.V. has among other evils advanced disrespect for authority, abuse of sex, permissiveness, crudity, violence, social fragmentation and gambling. To what purpose can television be put? What is to be the standard? How can we evaluate programmes? This last question in particular receives attention.*

Television and the Christian Part two—the box in the dock!

Geoffrey Thomas

Evaluating television programmes

WHAT SORT OF TELEVISION PROGRAMMES CAN WE OR OUR CHILDREN WATCH with benefit? There are some great principles which can guide us in Philippians 4:8: *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.* Are there such things on television?

Whatsoever things are true

Firstly, is it *true?* Does it portray life as it really is? From our experience we know that men and women do not invariably "marry and live happily ever after"; the baddies are not always captured while the goodies ride off into the sunset. Life is often cruel and unjust; men are disillusioned and love grows cold. On the other hand it is easy to gain the "morning-after-the-latest-outrage" mentality of acceptance and fail to see sin in its true light, hateful because of its mercilessness and destruction. The Bible is truthful and balanced when it presents us with its leading figures. It shows us such men as Noah, Abraham, Samuel, David and Peter as they are, men of weakness and like passions with us, but also men of nobility and victory over many temptations. The Bible does not paper over, nor does it condone, the sins of its saints; how unlike the heroes of the world they are! The cowboy or the detective appears invariably honest and altruistic; Dr. Who, the science fiction creation, is a messianic figure complete with preternatural power combatting evil in whatever form. He never sins, loses his temper or has a lustful thought for the women who continually surround him—virginal and impeccable.

He is as unreal and one-dimensional as the wholly evil creatures he opposes. The children who are abysmally ignorant of the true Messiah who has come into the world to deal with sin are consumed with the myths of false messiahs.

Again, there is a great difference between historical truth and reconstructions by dramatists. John Osborne's *Luther* is not the figure history knows, neither is the Thomas More portrayed by Robert Bolt, neither is the Cranmer of the series on Henry VIII's wives, nor the regularly appearing Mary Queen of Scots, so helpless and heroic as she confronts the ruthless Knox. These are but the products of biased writings of shallow men. Their plays are designed to put across orthodoxy and morality as crude intolerance and hypocrisy while the mild upholder of moderation is a far superior individual. How easy it is to use historical events to draw two sets of characters in which those embodying error have the superior personality while those representing the truth are belittled.

Then there are the presentations of biographies of notorious criminals whose fame and interest lie solely in their crime. The popular films of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *Bonny and Clyde* seem to be the epitome of this type of drama. The characters are open law-breakers, violent thieves and fornicators but are adorned with many qualities (never possessed by them) such as courage, magnanimity, generosity, wit and genius. From admiring the criminal it is but one step to excusing the vice. Thus moral distinctions are eroded. In actual life we find that wicked men are coarse and repulsive. Vice soon robs its victims of that grace and attraction which makes the fictitious hero so dangerous an example. But the trend in presenting the police on T.V. is the very opposite; the upholder of justice is increasingly shown as dishonest, easily bribed, intent on promotion at any cost, and as callous as the murderer he hunts. Despite this, the various British crime detection series may seem among the less harmful of the light entertainment programmes though the success of one series produces a rival on another channel or another night. The spectacle of T.V. running in circles after its tail grows tedious even when the dizzy hound is in colour!

Even more problematical in this whole realm of television presentation and the truth is the fact that most people believe that they can trust what they have seen. An "eye-witness' is considered dependable. In a recent survey 45 per cent. of the public named T.V. as the most impartial and trustworthy media on political news. Yet television can be one of the most distorted media of communication. An infamous example of this was seen in the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in August, 1968. We saw the news broadcasts of people courageously resisting the invasion, shaking their fists and attacking the tanks and troop carriers. There was an impotent world protest. Some months later, people in the Russian

bloc countries saw the very same pictures. Only the commentary had been changed. The people gesticulating and shaking their fists were now described as enthusiastically greeting the Russian deliverers who had come to save the land from a capitalist takeover. The very same pictures supported this impression. How careful we must be not to believe something simply because we saw it on television. There is a contrived image of reality created by the camera, and people, because they see what they were told to see, think they have seen the truth.

If then we want to get to the bottom of something, for example, the situation in South Africa or in Rhodesia or in Chile, we must not depend upon television. What is television? Primarily it is an entertainment medium and one of its most important criteria is the ratings—how many watch this programme? It is a commercial proposition, so the criteria employed for its selection of news and documentaries are determined by such questions as what is the most dramatic? Or the most entertaining? Or what gives the best visual image? The great, soft, predigested, sludgy bulk of the programmes are there to lull and entertain the viewer, not to awaken his sensibilities; not to shake him into action but to cuddle him into fireside indifference so that his own and the world's problems recede into the background. The Christian is commanded to consider and think upon those things that are true; that is not always easy; but the Christian was never promised ease.

Whatsoever things are honest

Are these things honourable and worthy of respect? Paul is challenging us. He writes elsewhere that we must give honour to whom honour is due and Peter illustrates this by commanding husbands to honour their wives. In applying this to the world of television one may consider the rôle women play in many programmes. Generally the picture of women presented is not honourable and does not invite respect. It is absolutely different from the place of dignity, love and honour given to them in the New Testament where women are truly liberated. "We never find the apostle drawing a depreciated picture of woman; every allusion of his to the believing woman is full of reverent respect and honour. Among the Christian women who come into Paul's history there is not one who is portrayed after this imagined pattern of childish ignorance and weakness . . . they all appear in the narrative as bright examples of Christian intelligence, activity, dignity, and nobleness" (Dabney's *Discussions*, Vol. 2, p. 109). How different are the women portrayed in much of television —inferior persons, sex toys, status symbols, the target of cruel male contempt, subject to endless indignities and the distortion of their God-created place for some cheap laughs. The place of women on T.V. with a few exceptions is sad and ugly. Where is the mutual respect? Where are the intelligent, gentle, concerned mothers? All too often the character of the woman is presented as aggressively lustful, her advances rebuffed only because of the timidity of the man. Thus the legend grows that a man

who seeks to observe the seventh commandment today is as outmoded as the stage-coach.

Whatsoever things are just

Television often speaks out against selected cases of injustice and the Christian's conscience is immediately aroused. We dare not even appear to drag our feet in cases of injustice like racialism, exploitation of the poor, imprisonment without trial and cruelty to animals. The Christian has a social conscience which impels him to act according to his ability and insight. But so often on T.V. the wrong diagnosis of the human predicament is given. A number of plays are shown which have the same formula, that human miseries and misfortunes are due to our circumstances and not to our natures, and so the blame for them lies at society's door collectively and not on the individual men and women who compose it. This is illustrated in the *Punch* cartoon of the judge looking expectantly at the foreman of the jury who is standing up and saying, with his head bowed, utterly dejected, "We are *all* guilty, my lord". So marriages break up and love dies—all according to the T.V. because of improper housing. Drug addicts go to their death because they have been deprived of comfortable homes and parents who misunderstood them. Drunks lie helplessly under bridges as the innocent victims of a cruel and callous social system—this is the T.V. message to the nation. This is something that appeals to many people, otherwise we would not hear it so often. It enables people to feel compassionate at no moral or material cost to themselves. So compassion degenerates to sentimentality and moral titillation is a substitute for sacrificial action. Of course a person's background and family environment have a tremendous influence over him. But they are not the cause of his sin. Men steal, kill and turn to drugs or drink because they choose to do so as individuals. God never hems a man in by presenting him with a series of choices all of which are wrong. Never is a sinner constrained to sin; there is always the right course of action to take. Hence the blame for his conduct lies upon himself and not upon society. The Christian wants to see more justice and a more equitable society, but he also insists that this can only be attained by a view of man as fallen with a bias to evil, as responsible for his life before a holy Creator and as needing above all regenerative grace by the Holy Spirit.

Whatsoever things are pure

Gross impurity on television has caused concern in recent years; this concern has led to the emergence of Mrs. Whitehouse as a national figure and to the production of the Longford report. Could T.V. producers present with impunity increasingly "outspoken" programmes—which usually in practice meant blatantly erotic scenes? The clamour raised for restraint and the strength of popular opinion behind it brought predictable responses from the liberal establishment. It argued that there

was no connection between impurity witnessed and subsequent behaviour. To reply, one simply points to the record statistics for venereal disease; or one asks what of the persuasion of T.V. advertising for which manufacturers will pay vast sums of money? Politicians are studiously schooled in the right techniques to use, to communicate their message. Again it is argued by the establishment that pornography is in the eye and mind of the beholder and it cannot be defined. Of course, situations and fashions change, but generally there is no great difficulty in recognising it. At least, the compilers of the weekly T.V. papers have no problems in selecting photographs from forthcoming productions in order to encourage viewers to watch them.

The Christian is confronting a mentality which almost desperately desires to be identified with things "progressive". Any doubt about the value of this progress is deemed absurd, reactionary. The "future" is a beacon while the "past" is a long struggle upward through the darkness towards the present. It is significant how the epithet "puritan" is hurled at opponents of fashionable mentality; there is a certain truth there but the record must be put straight. The Puritans were not repressive bigots on the subject of physical love. They had a positive attitude to sex and marriage and left Elizabethan literature unsuppressed. They were against lust and so some opposed certain dances and stage plays; they treasured the family unit and marital faithfulness and deplored any attack upon it. They strongly believed in the physical side of marriage; the Rev. William Gouge in *Of Domesticall Duties* used Proverbs, chapter 5, verses 18 and 19 to express the joy and beauty of this. Another passage they cited was Genesis 26 : 8 where it is recorded that "Isaac was sporting with his wife". Thomas Gataker, in a sermon, observes that it is a tactic of the devil to misrepresent Christianity as a damper placed upon the joys of living. This, he says, is "an illusion of Sathan, whereby he usually perwades the Merry Greekes of the world; That if they should once devote themselves to the Service of Jesus Christ, that then they must bid an everlasting farewell to mirth and delight; that then all their merry dayes are gone; that in the kingdome of Christ there is nothing, but sighing and groning, and fasting and prayer. But see here the contrary; even in the kingdome of Christ, and in his House, there is marrying and giving in marriage, drinking of wine, feasting, rejoicing even in the very face of Christ." Very different from the Puritans were the middle-classes of London in the period of the Restoration, whose attitudes are evident in Restoration comedy—superficial, immature and coarse, and displaying contempt for marriage and love.

Returning to contemporary television, what about the effects of the degenerate life style it portrays on our children? T.V. advertisements are revealing in their portrayal of the ambitions of wide-eyed young. Utopia is to belong to the "jet-set", enjoying the glossy privileges of the "new Europeans", coolly smoking the finest Virginian, drinking vodka by candle

light, flying to popular resorts along the Mediterranean, sporting gaudy and daring attire. This is the erotic scene which is projected into our homes before our children, more dangerous than open immorality and four-letter words because more subtle. Alongside it we place the humour of "Till Death us do Part", "Monty Python's Flying Circus", Peter Cook and Dudley Moore, "Steptoe and Son", and Marty Feldman in which the most serious truths and sacred institutions are not exempt from mockery. It is pointed out that before the bedtimes of most children programmes are more vulgar than vicious, smutty than pornographic, infantile rather than pernicious and so are more suitable for family viewing! After 9 p.m. the more crude and offensive expressions are presented, scenes of fleshly intimacies without any regard for man's natural discretion. Recognising the damage and harm of this does not depend upon statistical research but on the declaration of God's Word and the experience of its corrupting power in our lives. No one can say that he is immune to it. King David was not immune to the power of suggestion. The presentation of biblical love, wholly lacking in self-consciousness and characterised by patience and self-denial, can never be successfully upheld against the falsifying and degrading power of the camera lens with its obsession with visual fantasies and sensations. "Then switch it off" comes the reply, but in the circumstances of most family viewing, at least in unbelieving households, this check is largely illusory. It is not easy to switch off while some distasteful advertisements last only a minute and in many households the T.V. set is turned on in the early evening and left running until bed-time. Most people have only a single sitting-room in which their set is placed and in which the family gather during the evening hours. Where can the converted teenager go in an ungodly household? It must be recognised that what will be screened will be viewed by all the family but for the exception of the very late programmes. The result of a constant encounter with an impure life-style unaccompanied by any moral condemnation is a steady vitiation of the capacity for discrimination and censure and a cooling of one's ardour for holiness. Whatsoever things are pure—these are the things to think of, says Paul.

Whatsoever things are lovely

We are to think of those things that are lovable, that excite genuine and proper admiration. Here we may include all true skills, craftsmanship and abilities. Television can introduce us to many of God's wonders in creation; photography of the undersea world. wildlife and peoples in distant parts. It can also show to us the skills of the salmon fisherman or the spin bowler. Television can capture the excitement of a sporting contest—the runner straining every muscle to breast the tape or the co-ordination of the pole-vaulter. Amateur sports in particular can be thrilling without all the overtones of vested interest, violence, gambling and xenophobia which make professional sports a cult for so many. Again, one judges that much of television is unlovely and one thinks in

particular of that which appeals to man's cupidity and greed. There are, for example, the quiz programmes which ask very simple questions and shower lavish prizes on the winners to the accompanying "ooh's" and "aah's" of the studio audience. The whole atmosphere is characterised by materialism and covetousness. Folk have a spending image instilled into them and the worst, materialistic vices of our civilisation are shown. The Christian cannot get involved or in any way excited by such programmes. He must think on whatever things are lovely.

Whatsoever things are of good report

Is it commendable? Here again there is a broad category of things which commend themselves to the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ whose mind has been enlightened by his word. Perhaps here it would be fitting to express misgivings about religious broadcasting. In 1955 Billy Graham held a series of meetings in the Kelvin Hall in Glasgow and on Good Friday his preaching was broadcast across the nation. Returning to school I discovered that two boys in my year had made professions of faith as a result of hearing the broadcast and were earnestly witnessing to their faith to an interested fifth form. I identified with them as a young Christian and soon a Christian Union was started in the school. That did *me* more good than any of the unbelievers there. One of the two boys soon showed he was a stony-ground hearer (the boy who continued was from a Christian home), yet that outburst of witness and the ensuing debates could all be attributed to the impact of a sermon preached without any razzmatazz trimmings to a large interested audience. Such sermons are extremely rare on television. Much of religious television is dreadful. There is, for example, the tasteless vulgarity of showbiz Christianity where stars of the most dubious morals and backgrounds are invited to sing hymns before large choirs. Or there is the sheer intellectual snobbery of other programmes with discussions on such topics as Icelandic flood myths. Or there are the "Songs of Praise" with choirs herded in from miles around—male voice parties and glee clubs—and coached in dramatic renditions of hymns in buildings normally occupied by a handful of worshippers on any other Sunday. Then there is the publicity given to the most strident voices of criticism both from within and without the church, the presentation of the gimmicky, the sensational and the heretical.

Generally, religious broadcasting has little to commend it and make it "of good report". But what programmes would evangelical Christians produce if they were given the opportunity? Indeed the opportunity exists; there is no reason to believe that any attractively presented statements of the historic Christian position would be turned down by the television companies. We groan at the third-rate, but we have little ability to use the existing opportunities to communicate the first century message through twentieth century media. Lately there have been some stirrings of interest and concern to get involved in television.

If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise

This conclusion of the apostle's is the most broadly based. He returns to the fundamental themes of the Christian mind—those things which are excellent and praiseworthy, and which alone should be the focus of our attention. These words of the apostle take the vampire of frivolous mass communication by the throat and wage mortal battle with it. The Bible throughout its pages takes man seriously as God's image-bearer, and as redeemed by the power of Jesus and filled with his Spirit he is summoned to exalted tasks and magnificent interests. His imagination, his mind, his preoccupations—everything about him is considered sacred. The invitation of Philippians, chapter 4 to think about worthy subjects is like a breath of fresh air as our environment is defiled with smut and becomes heavy and stale with moral pollution. The empty laughter with which men are satisfied is appalling. Joy is gone for many and they actually accept this laughter as its substitute. Of course, people have always enjoyed a good laugh once in a while, but historians of culture will most likely conclude that there has never been a generation in which laughter has been pursued with greater persistence and dogged determination than now. Human beings staring transfixed at an electronic mixture of recorded laughter and pointless inanities for hours each week probably tell us more about the general deterioration of humanity than the terrible headlines which break out across the front page of the newspaper. People who can be entertained by such a fraudulent expression of the unreal cannot be expected to conduct themselves morally, nor rise to high points of personal achievement and sacrifice.

If you are just drifting in the channels of television and enslaved to the box you need a saviour. That One is Jesus Christ the Son of the living God. Repent of your sin, the sin which allows you to be satisfied in the escape from reality television has become for so many. Come to Jesus Christ and start to think about whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous and praiseworthy.

Does that sound a tall order? Christ can help you think about such exalted subjects as these. He will rescue you from the death of a mind gone blank and empty, that death which T.V. can bring so easily to a man and his family.

Can you live with T.V.? That is a very important question today. There are those who use it strictly as a means of information whose control of the box is absolute as it is of the radio, but how many are in this category? Some who read these paragraphs may be awakened to see that they are under the spell of T.V. and gripped by it. They may reach for an axe to destroy the box. Better you destroy it than it you! Many viewers would confess that while there is a control, more or less, much valuable time has been squandered away. Individual responsibility is heavy. If you have a box why not inscribe it with the text Phil. 4:8 and make that your inviolable condition for viewing?

The Story of the Evangelical Library

MR. GORDON R. SAYER (SEE COVER AND PAGE 33) IS NOW THE LIBRARIAN and Secretary for the Evangelical Library situated in the West End of London at 70A Chiltern Street, WIN 2HB. As a young man he was asked to join the committee of the Library. That was some thirty years ago and now only two members of that original committee remain, namely Dr. Lloyd-Jones and Mr. Sayer.

Full of precious volumes the Evangelical Library should be viewed a gift of God to the Christian Church, a gift which needs to be cherished, preserved and used to the full. The annual membership fee is only £1, in order to encourage those who have slender incomes. Full use can be made of the Library through the post but for those who are able to travel to London the Library is open from Monday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily. This invaluable collection of books is particularly rich in the realm of works on revival and also on the Puritan era. Today the Library stands at the crossroads as the lease is due to expire shortly. The need for new premises which will be adequate to house the one hundred thousand books is urgent.

The inception of the Library could be traced back to 1904 when Geoffrey Williams was converted at the age of seventeen. He was invited by a girl-friend to attend the preaching of the late J. K. Popham of Brighton. Reluctantly and full of pride he agreed but theatening to walk out if he was irked by the preacher. However, God designed the exposition to bring him into a profound conviction of his need. Mr. Popham was an ardent lover of books and encouraged the young convert to read classics by men such as Bunyan, Rutherford and John Owen.

It was in 1924 that Mr. Williams began to lend his own books to others and also to devote his energies to the collecting of volumes, having in mind the establishment of an evangelical library.

At this point it is interesting to recall a comment by Dr. Lloyd-Jones, "Mr. Williams", he said, "is by nature a bibliophile. One can be a great reader without being a collector and lover of books". But not only was Mr. Williams a bibliophile, he was also a promoter and organiser.

To continue the story, eventually twenty-five thousand books had been housed in his own home and in various sheds erected for that purpose at Beddington, a locality quite unsuitable because of inaccessibility to the public.

It was in 1939 that two remarkable providences took place. The first was when a shop-keeper, on what one would term a chance meeting with Mr. Williams, insisted on his being introduced to Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, this shop-keeper having briefly heard of the need for premises. From their first meeting a partnership was established between Mr. Williams and 'the Doctor' and from that time onward 'the Doctor' has been a major encouragement and guide in all the work undertaken by the Evangelical Library. The second extraordinary providence was the provision of premises in a central position during the early years of the war when everything would seem to militate against such a possibility.

Mr. Williams retired last year, handing over the leadership to Mr. Sayer. Through his long service Mr. Williams never ceased in his zeal to ferret out valuable volumes and also to work toward the establishment of branches of the Library in overseas countries.

The Evangelical Library Bulletin published quarterly and consisting of about twelve pages provides news of the progress of the branches. For instance, one can read of new members being enrolled to the Library in Adelaide, Australia. There the leader of the work recently held a Library dinner with eighty-two people present! There is a branch of the Library at L'Abri in Switzerland where the well-known Dr. Francis Schaeffer conducts his ministry. Sweden, Argentina, Hungary, Guyana, Austria, India and Taiwan are among the many countries where branches have been established.

The establishment of the Evangelical Library in a major centre such as London has been a major means of preserving and extending the truth and making it available to many other countries.

It is just such a vision which has been given to Bill and Mary Barkley who are labouring to establish "The Evangelical Library of Brazil" in the main population centre of that country, namely, São Paulo. They are involved in building up a reference library not only in Portuguese but also in English. The Evangelical Library in London has loaned them one hundred and fifty books, but we are all invited by Bill Barkley to send him books which may be of value from a reference point of view, or any books which have a true expository content. We can remember that there are special rates for books when posting and the address to use for sending volumes to São Paulo is: Mr. W. Barkley, Caixa Postal 1287, 01.000, São Paulo, Brazil. No declaration slip is needed when the book rate is used for the post.

The work of these Libraries is worthy of the enthusiastic support of Christians. There is a constant need not only to preserve the valuable old volumes now out of print but also for Libraries to be well stocked with contemporary volumes vital for research purposes. A free grace awakening in recent years has meant that the value of the old books has

been recognised and it is no longer possible to obtain them cheaply. Also, modern volumes are extremely expensive. The financial need of these Libraries is obvious.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to Mr. Geoffrey Williams for the perseverance he has shown in building up the Library under circumstances which sometimes have been extremely daunting. We can also be grateful that he never lost his vision of the need of revival. He pointed out that, "The greatest leaders of revival have always testified to the help and inspiration which they have received from the records of previous visitations of grace. The force of these facts has led me to spare no pains in collecting every work connected with those times of God's special favour".

It is now one hundred and fifteen years since the Church was visited with a general awakening. Should the Lord answer our prayers and visit us once more, it is certain that the valuable treasures preserved in the Library will be even more greatly esteemed and valued than they are now.

Canadian Bible Conference

The Fellowship for Reformation and Pastoral Studies has organized a Conference from May 26-28, 1975, to be held at the Royal York Baptist Church, 1520 Royal York Road, Weston, Toronto. Pastor Bill Payne, who has contributed an article in this issue of *Reformation Today*, is to speak three times on the subject of The Intercession of Christ. Other speakers include Leigh Powell, Doug Dakin, Alan Turner, Roger Fellows, Jim Clemens and Tom Reilly. This Conference is commended to the prayers of our readers.

Adventure Camp in the Yorkshire Dales

August 18-27, 1975

Camping close to farm with all amenities. Full staff including qualified medical staff. Comprehensive programme of activities—hiking, orienteering, swimming, camp-fires, and daily Bible studies. Ages 12-17. Cost £15. Organized by Leeds Reformed Baptist Church.

Write to: P. Maybury, 53 Beechwood View, LEEDS, LS4 2LP.

Bill Payne is the pastor of the Reformed Baptist Church of Burlington, Ontario. He examines for us the paraphrase of the Scriptures called the Living Bible. *Whether it is right to encourage paraphrases rather than translations is a subject deserving further consideration.*

The Dying Bible!

RECENTLY A CHRISTIAN LADY EXPRESSED SURPRISE THAT A WELL-KNOWN Canadian department store was advertising Bibles in a large newspaper. The Bible in question was the *Living Bible*, and the fact that a department store was selling them is an indication of its popularity in our day. This paraphrased Bible by Dr. Kenneth Taylor, recommended by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and promoted by massive publicity campaigns, has sold millions of copies. It seems to be especially popular with young people.

Unfortunately, there are many things about the *Living Bible* which give cause for misgivings and we suspect that its unfaithfulness to the words and intent of the Holy Spirit in the writings of Holy Scripture will produce serious problems, unless they are challenged. In my opinion, men of free grace persuasion who see the importance of the truth of Divine sovereignty have cause for alarm. Its treatment of a number of texts in which this facet of truth is presented is lamentably Arminian. Let me illustrate the reason for my concern.

Romans 8:28-39 is a major passage spelling out God's sovereign activity in the salvation of his people. Verses 29, 30 present the "golden chain" that begins with God's foreknowledge of his people and ends with their glorification by him. Able writers down the years have clearly demonstrated that the word translated "foreknow" (proegnō) does not simply mean prescience, but to "love beforehand", "to regard someone with love and affection at a time previous". The word is closely linked with the idea of foreordination, and indeed it is translated in that way in 1 Peter 1:20. However, Arminianism has ever tried to undermine God's sovereign choice of his people by suggesting that God chose to salvation those whom he foresaw would accept his salvation by the exercise of their free will. Arminians have tried to maintain this doctrine by appealing to the word "foreknow" in Romans 8:29 and other places. One is therefore astounded to find this Arminian interpretation thrust into the text of the *Living Bible*, and presented as though it represented the Word of God. Listen to Dr. Taylor's paraphrase: "for from the beginning God decided that those who came to him—and all along he knew who would—should become like his Son . . .". No Greek text anywhere gives the slightest support for those words. This is an unwarranted intrusion

of a human opinion (and a dangerous and erroneous one at that) into the Word of God.

Acts 13:48 is one of the clearest statements in Scripture concerning fore-ordination to eternal life. It reads, "and when the Gentiles heard this they were glad, and glorified the Word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed". These words have been a constant source of difficulty to those who refuse to acknowledge the exercise of Divine sovereignty in salvation. J. A. Alexander comments, "the violent attempts which have been made to eliminate the doctrine of election or predestination from this verse, by rendering the last verb "disposed", "arrayed", etc., or by violent construction, such as that adopted by Socinus . . . can never change the simple fact that wherever this verb occurs elsewhere, it invariably expresses the exertion of power or authority, divine or human. Since it is in the passive voice, it cannot denote mere disposition, much less self determination." The *Living Bible* provides yet another of those "violent attempts" to which Alexander referred. It renders the text, "when the Gentiles heard this they were very glad and rejoiced in Paul's message; *and as many as wanted eternal life, believed.* So God's message spread all through that region" (italics mine).

Free grace preachers have often pointed out the significance of those verses of Scripture which clearly indicate that repentance and faith are the gifts of God to his people. Acts 11:18 and 2 Timothy 2:25 are outstanding examples of verses which teach that repentance itself, though exercised by the sinner, is nevertheless God's gift to that sinner. Acts 11:18 reads, "when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life". It is clear from this reading (and the Greek bears it out) that repentance unto life is that which God gave the Gentiles. However, the *Living Bible* renders it, "when the others heard this, all their objections were answered, and they began praising God! Yes, they said, God has given to the Gentiles too, the privilege of turning to him and receiving eternal life". In a very subtle way, the significance of the phrase has been changed. The "privilege" has now become that which God gave! How or why the Gentiles turned to God is left unanswered, and will undoubtedly be supplied according to the views of the reader. But the fact that the very turning itself, "repentance", was God's gift is removed from the text. 2 Timothy 2:25 meets a similar fate. It reads, "in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth". Here again the Holy Spirit clearly indicates that repentance is the gift of God. While he uses means—instruction given in meekness by God's servant—repentance is still seen to be ultimately a gift of God, and one which he may either give or withhold as he sees fit. However, the *Living Bible* renders it this way: "for if you talk meekly and courteously to them they are

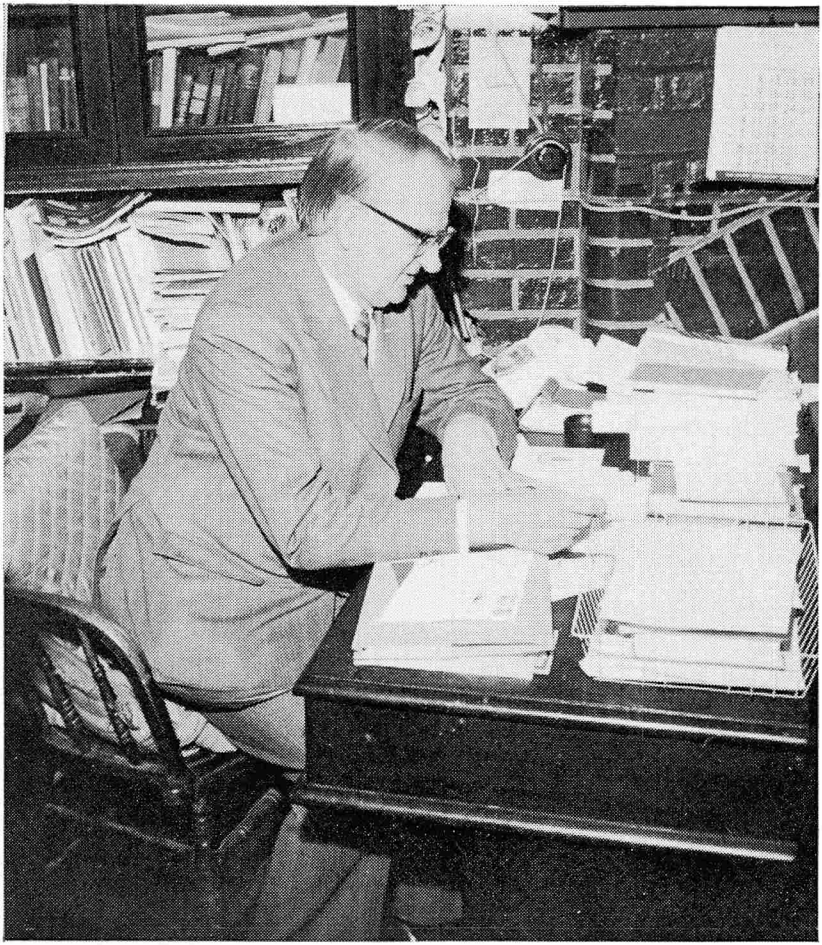
more likely, with God's help, to turn away from their wrong ideas and believe what is true". All trace of a sovereign, God-given gift has disappeared. True, it acknowledges "God's help" but the efficacy now is "talking meekly and courteously to them"; and hope for success now lies in the effectiveness of the servant, rather than in the grace of the Lord.

One other illustration must suffice to support our contention. The *Living Bible* rendering of James 1:18 is astonishing to say the least. The text as given by the Spirit of God is a clear indication of the fact that the root cause of our regeneration is not the will of man, but the will of God. It reads, "of his own will begat he us with the word of truth". However, one is saddened to read in the *Living Bible,* "and it was a happy day for God when he gave us our new lives, through the truth of his word . . .". In this instance the correct reading is given in a footnote. One wonders whether this was not dictated by conscience. The damage, however, has been done in the main text.

Now I readily admit that there are other passages in the *Living Bible* where verses relating to God's sovereignty are rendered in a way consistent with their true meaning, but these passages are undermined by the gross abuse of key verses as illustrated in this article. It is also true to say that sometimes footnotes give the correct rendering but, as we have said, the damage has already been done in the actual text. Again, we recognise that the *Living Bible* declares itself to be a paraphrase. But in no way is that an excuse for such perversion of the Word of God. Let us not deceive ourselves. To hundreds of thousands of modern-day evangelicals, especially young people, this is *The Bible!* We are being naïve if we think that corruptions of the Word of God will not influence the minds of those who use the *Living Bible.* I recall with sadness a personal experience, in which a fine young Christian opposed my presentation of the doctrine of sovereign election. In defence of his views he appealed to Romans 8:29 as given in the *Living Bible.* This, he claimed, was what the Bible taught, and he was deaf to my explanation that what he read here in the *Living Bible* was not the Word of the Holy Spirit, but the opinion of Kenneth Taylor injected into the passage.

It is never an easy task to oppose that which has gained great popularity, but if we value the truth of God, and are concerned that our people grasp the great doctrines of the faith, we must be prepared to discourage the use of the *Living Bible.*

Its title is a misnomer. It ought to be called the *Dying Bible.* When the original Scriptures are tampered with and that which is Divinely robust is turned into that which is flabby and sentimental to please the fleshly pride of fallen man we are following a course which leads to death rather than life. Is not this tendency to weakness and ultimately spiritual lifelessness not reflected in the whole fabric of so-called Christianity today?



Mr. Gordon Sayer sitting at his desk (see p. 27).

SOUTH AFRICA. 30 June–4 May.

Annual Evangelical and Reformed Conference, Skoegheim.

Theme: God's Common Grace. Speakers: Martin Holdt, David Kingdon, Herbert Carson, Jim van Zyl, Clive Tyler and Erroll Hulse. For details write to George Stranex, 404 Manning Road, Durban.

CALIFORNIA. 21–26 July.

Sovereign Grace West Coast Family Conference.

Principal speakers: Don McKinney and Erroll Hulse. Theme: The Christian under the doctrines of grace. For details write to Ron Edmonds (see back cover).

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